

## Briefing 6 – Identifying, reporting and monitoring sexual harassment against women in the workplace

### 1. Introduction

#### Summary of key points

- It is important to find gender-sensitive ways to identify, report and monitor sexual harassment.
- Sexual harassment and violence are very sensitive issues and many women fear that there will be reprisals and consequences if they report cases of sexual harassment.
- Practical, creative and participatory techniques are needed to help identify and monitor workers' experience of sexual harassment.

This briefing looks at a range of practical tools that can be used to identify and monitor violence and sexual harassment in the world of work. There are many challenges in identifying the problem: the nature of global supply chain workplaces, the invisibility and under-reporting of the issue, lack of effective systems to prevent gender-based violence and sexual harassment, fear of consequences and lack of power of vulnerable workers.

In some regions, forms of gender-based violence like verbal and physical abuse are so commonplace that victims regard such treatment as normal, even if it is disturbing. Workers, often fearful or too embarrassed to talk about sexual matters, may not realize that what happens to them is gender-based violence or sexual harassment, that it is against the law in their country and that other workers are also victims. Fear of reprisals, blaming the victim, and stereotypes of garment or farmworkers who are perceived as promiscuous and having 'low status', can all play a role in the under-reporting of sexual harassment. As sexual harassment is a very sensitive issue it is important to look at effective ways to collect data and to enable women to speak confidentially, openly and honestly, and to be able to do this safely as many women will fear the consequences of discussing their experiences.

Tailoring activities to workers' experiences is very important in reaching women workers and giving them a voice. Practical techniques that are discussed in this module aim to help identify and monitor workers' experiences of sexual harassment and abuse.

### 2. Carrying out consultations, surveys and research activities

#### Ethical guidelines for researchers and facilitators

It is important that all consultations and research that involves the participation and involvement of workers is grounded in an ethical approach. Researchers and facilitators should:

- Have realistic expectations and be aware of any constraints faced by the workers.
- Interviewers of women should be female.
- Make links with local women's organizations and community groups.
- Be constructive and positive and avoid focusing on the problems.
- Be respectful of people's time and commitments, for example, around childcare or family responsibilities when organizing activities.
- Keep language simple and clear; use a variety of methods as participants may not be able to read or understand complex concepts.
- Ensure confidentiality and gain the consent from participants if you are recording or taking notes.
- Be respectful, non-judgmental, impartial and non-discriminatory.
- Ensure that participants are fully informed about the objectives of interviews and consultations.
- Ensure that participants take learning from the process so that it is empowering for them.



**In preparing consultations, surveys and research activities facilitators should consider the following questions:**

- ➔ **What barriers do women face in participating in consultations to identify sexual harassment?**
- ➔ **What cultural pressures and barriers do women face?**
- ➔ **How do women's time pressures and unpaid work and childcare responsibilities affect their participation?**
- ➔ **Do women and men have different priorities?**
- ➔ **What can be done to remove barriers to participation of the most vulnerable women workers?**

## 2.1 Giving workers a voice through surveys and participatory research

This section presents a range of different research and data gathering activities that can be carried out to identify gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.

### **a) Consultations with women, girls and other stakeholders (including women's workshops or women's leadership programmes run by NGOs and trade unions)**

Consultations with women and girls and other stakeholders who are likely to be involved in the implementation of initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the world of work are important. This means taking account of workplaces and other public spaces (including the local community where people live, travel to and from work), as well as the risks of gender-based violence faced by young women who have migrated to urban areas to work in factories or farms. Some may be reliant on employer provided housing and transport.

Consultations should aim to:

- Encourage active participation and engagement with women and girls, and other stakeholders, in order to inform the content, scope and activities in the workplace (as well as public spaces, public transport, local neighborhoods).
- Encourage maximum engagement with women and girls about their experiences of sexual harassment – this will mean working with women most affected by harassment and violence, building their trust and listening to their experiences and suggestions.
- Draw on a range of consultation methods, for example, participatory research, facilitated focus group discussions, and women's safety audits.
- Involve a range of local stakeholders, such as a local trade union or women's organizations, who are likely to be instrumental in acting as partners, supporters and advocates.

### **b) Surveys to identify sexual harassment**

Worker surveys are very important in providing an evidence base to convince managers that sexual harassment is a problem in their factory or farm. Surveys – sometimes carried out with the support of global organizations – can challenge perceptions and lead to change. Examples of baseline surveys can be found in the box below.

Large-scale surveys can be expensive and require the involvement of researchers who have experience of working with vulnerable women. However, individual interviews, carried out with experienced researchers (or trained peer-researchers, discussed below) can be a powerful way to give 'voice to women' and capture women's life stories and the extent of sexual harassment in the world of work.



### Examples of baseline research

Baseline surveys, consisting of interviews with managers and workers, can produce a baseline from which to measure progress over time.

**Ugandan Workers Education Association (UWEA) and Women Working Worldwide (WWW)** (UWEA, 2011) carried out baseline research under their project ‘Developing Strategies for Change for Women Workers in African Horticulture’. Of the 11 flower farms and one fruit and vegetable farm surveyed, low pay meant that some women accepted sexual harassment as a normal practice in order to gain financial favours to supplement their low incomes; nearly half of workers agreed that sexual harassment occurred on the farms, especially by managers and supervisors and most sexual harassment cases were not reported for fear of loss of employment. The research suggested ways to change practices in the sector, including partnerships with trade unions, the negotiation of a collective agreement for the sector and a commitment to draw up a sector-wide sexual harassment policy.



For further information see **Case Study 8.3 in Module 8**.

**Fair Wear Foundation’s** (2013) baseline research on sexual harassment in Bangladeshi and Indian factories found wide differences in perceptions of yelling – a form of verbal abuse, often laden with sexually explicit language – between management and workers. Only 20 per cent of managers thought there was a lot of yelling in factories; while 60 per cent of workers thought it was common. Workers reported that the vast majority of problems are with their immediate supervisors, who change their behaviour when senior managers are on the factory floor. There is also a perception among many managers that while women may be yelled at, or occasionally hit, the environment is still preferable to other options available to them. See [http://www.fairwear.org/ul/cms/fck-uploaded/documents/fwfpublications\\_reports/StandingFirmReportFWF2013.pdf](http://www.fairwear.org/ul/cms/fck-uploaded/documents/fwfpublications_reports/StandingFirmReportFWF2013.pdf)

**Clean Clothes Campaign (2014) report ‘Stitched Up’** found that the garment industry sourcing model was fundamentally flawed. The survey of garment workers in ten countries (employing three million people in Turkey and Eastern Europe) found garment workers were subject to poverty wages, poor working conditions and long working hours, mirroring the experiences of workers in other parts of the world. The report also found that garment workers, the majority of whom are women, suffer sexual harassment, discrimination in pay and treatment, and limited union representation. (Clean Clothes, 2014)

A study by the **Sunflower Women’s Worker Centre** (CLB, 2014) in China of 134 women found extensive sexual harassment of female workers. Guangzhou, the hub of China’s manufacturing industry, is where most of China’s garment, textile, shoe, and accessory factories are located. Women are over-represented in factory line jobs and under-represented in management positions. 70 per cent had experienced some form of catcalling or inappropriate joking; 66 per cent reported inappropriate comments about their bodies or appearances; 55 per cent reported explicit staring at sexual areas of the body, such as breasts and hips; 32 per cent reported touching; and 30 per cent had been shown sexual images. Harassment was also reported outside of the workplace. Most workers did not report sexual harassment: 15 per cent quit their jobs and 43 per cent suffered the abuse in silence. None of the women surveyed had turned to a trade union or women’s organization for help. The workers felt powerless, frightened, and alone. One woman worker said: “I’m so scared. I cannot sleep well and I keep having nightmares. I just want to run away.”

**Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) survey on sexual harassment in Hong Kong service industries** found that nearly 60 per cent of female employees in the service sector had been sexually harassed at work. It happened most frequently in three industries: property management, airlines and retailing. Nearly 70 per cent of interviewees said that their workplaces either have no mechanisms for sexual harassment complaints or they were not aware of them if they existed. As a result, only 15 per cent of the victims reported their cases to the employers. The HKCTU hoped the report would encourage government and employers to tackle the problem of sexual harassment more seriously. For further information about the survey see: <http://en.hkctu.org.hk/hong-kong/press-release-and-statement-hk/more-than-half-of-female-employees-in-the-service-industry-have-been-sexual>



### Carrying out small-scale local surveys

There are a number of ways in which small-scale local surveys can be carried out. These can be useful in gaining up-to-date information of workers' perceptions about sexual harassment. They require fewer resources than the large-scale surveys described above.

- **Media Surveys:** these consist of simple surveys of workers or the community carried out outside the factory or farm (for example, in the community, where people live, or bus stations). The aim is to ask a few short questions about experiences of sexual harassment. The results, written up in a short press release for the media, can lead to extensive publicity and public debate in newspapers, radio and other channels.
- **Local union surveys:** at the local level unions can conduct simple surveys by asking three or four questions such as 'have you experienced sexual harassment at work or in transport to work?' Note the gender of the respondent and then compare percentages of women and men who have been sexually harassed. Local women's organizations and academics may be able to assist in producing a hard-hitting report and press release, with quotes and examples of sexual harassment in factories and the community. This kind of union report can give voice to the problem for the first time and lead to wider discussion and awareness.

Surveys released on International Women's Day (8 March) or UN Day to Eliminate Violence against Women (25 November) can get good coverage from the press and/or provide a reason to call a meeting to discuss sexual harassment.

### Participatory peer-led research

Peer-led participatory research is a tool that can be used to empower workers to identify and map sexual harassment in the workplace. Participatory peer-led research is a collaborative approach to research that is designed by and carried out by the people who are the subject of the research. It can be carried out by a trade union or local women's organization as a way of consulting with workers about their experiences of sexual harassment. Participatory research methodology has a focus on social change and social justice. It is based on collaboration between the researcher and participants who have knowledge and experiences from their real life situations.

The experiences and concerns of workers can also be used to frame the research questions and the approach to be taken in the research.

### c) Women's safety audits

A safety audit is a tool to take account of women's safety in the world of work, covering safety in relation to the planning of lighting, footpaths, open spaces and transport. They provide a participatory approach so that women themselves devise and suggest solutions to increase safety. For example it may be that women feel unsafe walking home at night after late shifts because the road is unlit – women could suggest the factory provides lighting or company transport for workers returning from work in the dark.

One way to carry out a safety audit is for a group of women to draw up a map, with a plan of the factory or farm, the journey to/from work, and/or urban area. Women are asked to use a coloured pin or label to mark the places that they find dangerous (e.g. inside the factory, outside factory gates, bus journey home) or areas they fear (e.g. working on a particular production line or canteen). These maps can be useful in identifying critical areas and the type of harassment experienced. The same principle has been applied to mobile phone maps.

➔ See Learning Activity 6.1: Mapping the world of work.

The **Gender Inclusive Cities Programme** run by Women in Cities International, aims to create cities that are inclusive and respectful of everyone, including women, to live, work and move around without fear or difficulty. It is being carried out in four cities – Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Delhi in India, Rosario in Argentina, and Petrozavodsk in the Russian Federation. During the first year of the programme, information was collected on the state of women's safety and inclusion in each city using safety audits, street surveys, desk research and focus groups. The findings informed the second and third years of the programme to improve women's safety and participation in decision-making processes. (Women in Cities International, 2011a, 2011b and 2012)



in the play, to decide on change and to rehearse action. Participatory theatre events and training can happen anywhere (e.g. community, street, workplace, men/women's organizations, union events). It is often called Forum Theatre.

➔ **Case study 6.1 below shows how participatory theatre (Forum Theatre) in Tanzania, Italy and Bangladesh has been used to raise awareness in local communities of sensitive issues, such as male violence, land grabs, child marriage and birth registration.**

## 2.3 The role of technology and the media

Using mobile phone technology and the media are additional ways in which information can be disseminated.

### a) New technology and mobile phones

New technology and mobile phones can be used to support gender-based violence and sexual harassment initiatives. They are particularly appropriate for disseminating sensitive or personal information that workers may not wish to 'be seen' viewing on a notice board.

Safetipin is a mobile app and online platform (available from usual app sources) that collects information about public spaces through a safety audit that can be done by anyone. An individual user conducts a safety audit, pins places where she feels unsafe or has faced any form of harassment. She is also able to see all the information that has been uploaded by others and make informed decisions about moving around the city or factory safely. **Read more about the SafetiPin at:** <http://safetipin.com>

Better Work programmes in Asia see the opportunity to reach out to workers through smartphones and other cell phones. In Cambodia the Kamako Chhnoeum (Outstanding Worker) project has a call-in voice response system to educate factory workers about labour rights by testing their knowledge via a multiple choice quiz on one of three topics—wages and allowances, personal health and occupational safety and health. The second part of the quiz is an open call for information and allows workers to name the factory where they work and provide information

about working conditions. Better Work is developing a rating system so that workers can score their factories on wages, benefits, and occupational safety and health. The information will be disseminated back to workers.

Better Work Indonesia has rolled out a series of apps to improve communications between factory managers and workers, as well as providing workers with practical information about their wages, rights and benefits, and issues related to occupational safety and health.

**For further information see:** <http://betterwork.org>

### b) Using the media

Trade unions, women's organizations and advocacy groups often use the media to inform, persuade and move people to action. Media stories of shocking conditions in factories and farms in global supply chains have had a very powerful role in influencing lead companies and brands to take action to require suppliers to provide decent work and safe working conditions. Using the media can be a powerful way to highlight and report on sexual harassment in global supply chain workplaces.

**Part C Information Sheet 3 (on-line) for tips on working with the media.**

➔ **Case study 6.2 gives some examples of how the media has been used to raise awareness about gender-based violence.**